

THE TELEGRAPH WIRE

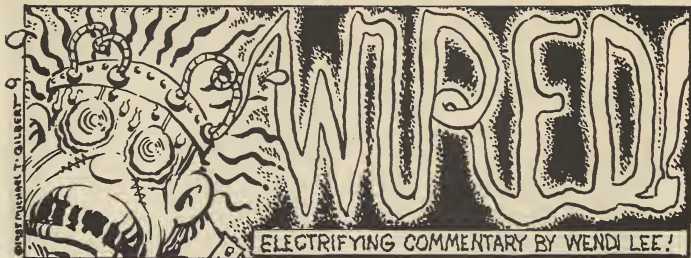
ISSUE 23

COMICS
& CONIX

FREE!



Inside: Alan Moore!



This is the first editorial written by yours truly. The marvelous illustration and logo is due to Michael T. Gilbert of MR. MONSTER fame. Many thanks for the first WIRED installment and to Mr. Gilbert. By the way, I hope all of you have heard that MR. MONSTER #3 will make history with a story by Alan Moore to go along with Mike's art. This may be history, folks!

I'm extremely pleased with this issue. Not only was I fortunate to obtain an interview with Alan Moore, but John Totleben sent me this lovely cover of SWAMP THING and Abby. The whole issue is in keeping with Halloween! Add to this the logo for WIRED by Michael T. Gilbert and I think I've gotten off to a pretty good start.

When I interviewed Alan Moore at the Comic-Con this past August, I didn't realize what a smooth interviewer he gave me. I usually prefer to break up an interview with a profile of the person, but this interview went so well that I found I couldn't cut any of it! In fact, I really didn't have to do much as an interviewer except listen and add an occasional comment.

If you haven't attended a Comic-Con before, I highly recommend it as a convention to attend at least once in your life! This is a great place to go if you want to meet interesting people, attend panels and sign up for seminars.

While I'm on the subject of conventions, I want to mention something that's bothered me for awhile. I've noticed that when someone as popular as Alan Moore attends a convention with his spouse, the spouse usually gets relegated to the background when fans converge upon the well-known artist. I'm no different; when I met a woman whose music had been a big part of my life, I was so overwhelmed by her presence that I almost totally ignored her companion. Once I'd recovered from this religious experience, I was ashamed

of my behaviour. In fact, I'm sure I looked like a perfect idiot in their eyes!

I guess it's something that celebrities have to put up with, but I vowed not to repeat that experience because I imagined how I'd feel in the other person's shoes. I just want to take a moment to acknowledge Phyllis Moore and other spouses who attend cons like San Diego and sacrifice their privacy and peace for these few days.

I know it gets mentioned countless times in this issue, but I want to express my unqualified rave over the MR. MONSTER series. Not only is Michael a great artist, but he has a great sense of humor in his writing. Of course, you know that issue #3 features a story by Alan Moore, don't you?

Other features in this issue include reviews of independent comics by Thom Roman, game reviews by our own Steve Perrin and Tom Whitmore's column reviews several children's books plus a new book by Samuel Delany.

Ann Schubert has been providing photos for THE TELEGRAPH WIRE for the last couple of issues. It was an oversight that her name was omitted from the last issue for the photos she took.

Two other photographers should be mentioned: Fay Gates and Jackie Estrada. Both obligingly sent me photos of the convention when I requested it. Thanks to both of them.

One more person to thank is my assistant editor, Markalan Joplin. He was there when I needed him and

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 THE TELEGRAPH WIRE #23, October/November 1985. Published bimonthly by Comics and Comix, Inc. Office of Publication: 405 California Avenue, Palo Alto, CA 94306. Copyright (C) 1985 individual contributors. All rights reserved. Subscriptions: \$5.00/six issues. Publisher: John Barrett. Editor: Wendi Lee. Assistant Editor: Markalan Joplin. Cover Logo: Tom Orzechowski. Cover Illustration: John Totleben, courtesy of DC Comics, Inc. SWAMP THING is TM and (C) 1985 DC. Printed at Western Offset in San Diego, with thanks to the very patient Ann Etheridge. All information contained herein is accurate to the best of our knowledge. This issue is dedicated to everyone who has encouraged, helped, and pushed me into this mess...and you know who you are, don't you? Special thanks to Diana Schutz for having the faith in me to take over this monumental task!

was the extra pair of hands and the second opinion when I needed one.

Our next issue comes out in December and if you, dear reader, have any questions or comments, please drop me a line: 405 California Avenue, Palo Alto, CA 94306.

Photo by Fay Gates



The original 3D Man--Jim Fitzpatrick
(THE SILVER ARM, THE BOOK OF CONQUEST and
ERINSAGA).

Photo by Fay Gates



At the San Diego Comic-Con, we were fortunate to run across Jerry Siegel and his first model for Lois Lane--who happens to be Mrs. Siegel!

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ECCENTRIC EVOLUTIONS

by JOHN BARRETT
PUBLISHER

If you've been following the BUYER'S GUIDE recently (or any of the other news sources within our industry), then you may have encountered one of the numerous distributor and/or publisher wars that are raging. These may take the form of who's suing whom, what fan favorite creator has jumped ship or what distributor is competing with his retail accounts; these are just some of the various and insundry shapes these fights are taking. Somehow, this all makes me feel like I'm reading the sports page--what with its preponderance of scandals, I'm never one to miss jumping on the bandwagon! I thought I would devote this column to the things that bother me as a retailer; this is September, after all--a time when I'm traditionally depressed).

My pet peeves are with distributors and manufacturers who use their positions for an advantage over the accounts they normally supply by undercutting their retail price to the point where others can't compete--or by having an initial exclusive on material.

Recently, I attended several conventions where these conditions were quite obvious. At one convention, a T-shirt producer and wholesaler was selling his shirts for \$7.00 retail--the same shirts normally sell for \$10.00 and are discounted 40% to 50%, depending on volume, to the same accounts with which he was competing. With all of the expenses involved in doing retail, especially through conventions, it's impossible for a retailer to be profitable on such a small margin--the level necessary to compete with the \$7.00 price. Yet if the merchant doesn't match the price, then the consumer sees the merchant as a big rip-off. Although the consumer gets a great deal with these super-low prices in the short run, he loses in the long run because unfair competition runs many retailers out of business and decreases the consumer's choices. This eventually drives up the prices because there's less choice of places to shop.

I had another unfortunate experience when a producer/supplier demanded the exclusive rights to sell a hot new STAR TREK item at a STAR TREK convention. In this incident, everybody lost. Comics & Comix lost an opportunity to sell a large quantity of this hot item. Further, many of our "regulars" (those people who check out our tables at the cons, but wait to make their purchases in our stores) may not be aware that this STAR TREK item is available through Comics &

Comix. The supplier lost twofold: while he made more retail sales than he normally would have at the convention (granted, at a higher profit margin than wholesale), his table's location was poor and more of those items would have been sold with better placement throughout the dealer's room--not to mention the free publicity the item gets from being carried in more than one place! Finally, since the other dealers were left with such a bad impression of the whole affair, we have very little trust in this supplier and won't support this product to the degree that we normally would have supported it. Therefore, he loses sales in the long run.

While conventions are on my mind, I might as well let loose with a little advice for the beginning entrepreneur. If you want to stage a convention, start with a blank calendar. Black out the weekdays; a few major conventions can pull decent crowds on a Thursday/Friday or a Monday, but these are the exceptions to the rules. Cross off all holidays--for example, if you're planning a two-day event and Motner's Gay falls on that Sunday, write off the entire weekend. At one time, successful shows were held on holidays, but that was before a plethora of conventions and stores moved in like a glacier where the fan could get his fix.

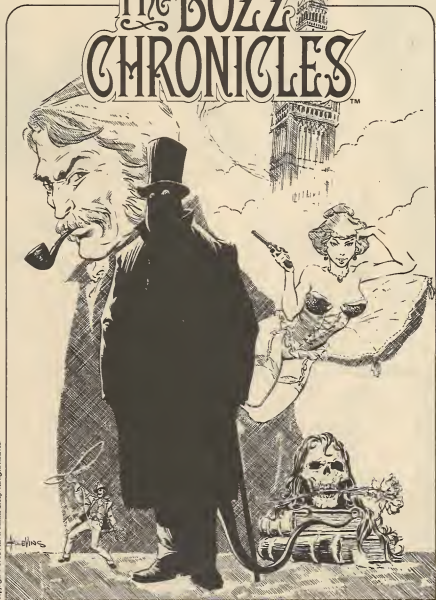
Forget December; scratch off other major events such as the World Series, the Superbowl, and play-offs as well as local events like the state and county fairs. Also, don't pick a date on or near a convention that's being held nearby.

Now if there are any blank spots left on the calendar, good luck! A word of advice: don't forget that a major attraction to any convention is a guest creator--a major artist who doesn't come to the area very often is a perfect choice. Remember to advertise like crazy if you want a successful response!

Since we'll soon be starting the Christmas season, I always cheer up and that will make my next column a little more upbeat. Thanks for putting up with my public primal scream...oops! I almost forgot to mention publisher/manufacturers who don't put suggested retail prices on their items, artists who fail to consider the retailer's problems with displaying their products by putting the logo on the side or at the bottom of the cover, and the artists who think that deadlines are Jack Benny jokes...oh, gosh. Here I go again!

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Before anything else, we should bid a fond farewell to Diana Schutz, who has done a superlative job editing and packaging THE TELEGRAPH WIRE since its inception, and who is also one of the finest people I've ever had the pleasure of working with. As you know, Diana is now an editor at Comico and has turned the WIRE over to her able assistant editor, Wendi Lee, with whom I suspect it will be a comarable pleasure to work.

Goodbye, Diana, but not really. At least we know where to find you.

Hello, Wendi, and welcome aboard, but not really. This is already your fourth issue.

When moving to a new city, there are certain things one does first, such as familiarizing one's self with the layout of the city, finding a job, and scouring the classifieds and rental offices for an apartment. These are all important matters to tend to, but first things first, and before the following Friday after one's arrival in his or her new locale, any and all comic book specialty shops must be located and scouted out. You might easily combine your job and apartment-hunting with your comic shop search, but as I said, first things first, and unless you want to miss the week's shipment of new goodies, it's in your own best interest to get right on top of things.

Having lived in at least four different cities in as many years, I can tell you that comic shops come in all different shapes, sizes and colors. In San Francisco, you couldn't ask for anything better than the Comics & Comix chain (no plug intended). They've got seven well-stocked stores scattered all over the Bay Area. Plus, there's a few other shops around town that are equally respectable.

Now that I'm in Alexandria, Virginia, I'm finding that I've been very spoiled by Comics & Comix back on the west coast. Miss Diana wrote about this same phenomenon several editorials ago, in reference to her own move back east. However, Geppi's Comic World, Inc. seems to be this area's equivalent to Comics & Comix. Geppi's stores are strategically located all around Maryland and northern Virginia, and their comics stores are comparable to Waldenbooks: very professional and efficient.

My weekly comic stop, though, is Tomorrow Books, in the Old Town section of Alexandria, partly because it's directly across the street from where I work, and partly because there's very little they don't stock. They're having a little trouble stocking Charlton's at the moment, and I had to go to Geppi's to find Will Eisner's COMICS AND SEQUENTIAL ART. But Tomorrow Books' ownership is very cordial and personable, and their subscription service (standard at most comic shops) takes the paranoia out of missing new books.

So, while it's true that there may well be more pressing matters to tend to when moving to a new city, there are few more satisfying than acquainting one's self with the local comics scene. And having done that, you can get back to the hell of basic survival with your batteries on full charge.

I'm almost fed up with this namby-pamby reluctance to publish some genuinely adult material. Okay, we've got a lot of good books like MR. X, LOVE AND ROCKETS, WILL EISNER'S QUARTERLY, STEVE CANYON, SWAMP THING... I've named them all before...but I'm sitting here looking at a book called ALACK SINNER--Flic O' Prive, by two guys named Jose Munoz and Carlos Sampayo, who had an incredible story in RAW #3, where they were described as "...Venezualans who respectively draw and script comics set in New York. Neither Munoz, based in Milan and Geneva, nor Sampayo, based in Barcelona, have ever been to the USA." This ALACK SINNER book is from France.

The subject matter is urban angst and crime with some surrealism and European art history thrown in for good measure, with Alack Sinner wandering through the fear and slime, always smoking and never smiling. He's a cop or a detective or maybe he's just a guy who likes walking on the wild side. Despite the fact that I'm unable to read a word of this book, the stories look interesting, full of disturbing characters and black satire; a caricature of an industrial society on the decline.

Munoz and Sampayo are on a par with Eisner in terms of realism and artistic excellence and individuality. These guys use the language of comics to the fullest extent, maneuvering their "camera" like a Martin Scorsese or a John Schlesinger, recreating life, focussing on its seamier aspects. There's a fabulous wordless sequence with Sinner waking up, lighting a cigarette, getting out of bed, going to the bathroom, making coffee and starting his day. They aren't subjugating the medium with protracted pseudo-epics and prerequisite mindless fight scenes (though they certainly don't shy away from violence). They're telling stories about adult characters, and no one runs around in a costume--not even a mask. And I'm thinking, "Why the hell isn't this translated and published in English?" I mean, everybody's talking about innovation and utilizing the medium for true artistic expression and producing mature material for intelligent, sensitive adults; yet all we actually produce is just more juvenile fantasy. We talk a good game and sometimes we get lucky and come out with a gem like MR. X or SWAMP THING or LOVE AND ROCKETS or WILL EISNER'S QUARTERLY (there I go again), but for the most part, we seem incapable of breaking free of this superhero hammerlock. In the back of ALACK SINNER is an ad for other books by guys like Hugo Pratt (by whom but a single 20-page story has ever been translated into English), and others who look extremely interesting; and let me tell you, it's terribly frustrating knowing that there's all this great stuff out there that we'll never be able to enjoy unless we can read French or Spanish or Italian.

Hey, I'm looking forward to MIRACLEMAN just as much as anybody else, and I like SWAMP THING and TIME SPIRITS and many others; Catalan Communication is translating a certain amount of European material for the American market--but when are we going to get serious? If I hear one more person talk about widening the audience with futile efforts like higher visibility of

existing product in toy stores and supermarkets, I think I'll scream.

It isn't as if nobody knows about this stuff. You could publish this stuff in any number of formats: standard 32-page color comics; black-&-white comics; soft-cover paperbacks like this French edition. Why is Blackthorne publishing inferior Golden Age reprints when all this European stuff is out there? Is it so difficult or costly to obtain reprint rights? Maybe. That would be the only acceptable excuse, and it wouldn't be the first time red tape pulled the rug out from under a worthy artistic enterprise.

If any of this strikes a common chord in you WIRE readers, how about writing a few letters to your favorite comic book company suggesting that they look at some of this stuff and consider publishing it in English. And you publishers out there should already be thinking along these lines!

If we, the fans and purveyors of this medium that we claim to hold so dear, don't go out on a limb and take a few risks, if we don't encourage artistic growth and actually take action to make it happen, no one else will.

I know I promised to stop ranting on this subject, but then something like ALACK SINNER passes in front of my eyes and I get all indignant again. So, it doesn't look like I'll be able to keep that promise until I get some positive, tangible results, by which time I'll probably have long stopped spinning in my grave.

The following is an intriguing little epigraph (copyright King Features Syndicate, Inc.) which novelist Tom De Haven attributes to our old friend, Popeye the Sailor. It appears in the opening pages of Tom's wonderful new novel, FUNNY PAPERS:

"A comic artist ain't no different than you or me or anybody except' he knows how to draw pitchers an' is crazy in the head."

I y'am what I y'am.

See youse at the racks...maybe.

Mark Burbey has written about comics and film for such publications as RBCC, CASCADE COMIX MONTHLY, CINEMACABRE, and SWANK, is a contributor to THE COMICS JOURNAL and COMICS INTERVIEW, and wrote THE MARVEL GUIDE TO COLLECTING COMICS. He has also had a number of stories published in DR. WIRTHAM'S COMIX STORIES.

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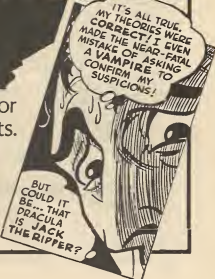


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MÖRE on MÖÖRE

An interview with Alan Moore



photo by Jackie Estrada

There's very little need to introduce a writer like Alan Moore--already his name has become familiar to SWAMP THING fans as well as collectors of Britain's WARRIOR, which has featured MARVELMAN (reprinted by Eclipse as MIRACLEMAN) and V FOR VENDETTA. Alan Moore has not only proved his writing is prolific and profound, but also versatile. Since his inception of SWAMP THING, Alan has written for AMERICAN FLAGG!, MR. MONSTER and has many projects in the offing--check out our column, MAIHLINES, for more information on his upcoming projects.

I was fortunate to catch Mr. Moore at the San Diego Comic-Con last August and he talked about his work on SWAMP THING as well as a very exciting project he's working on with Dave Gibbons called WATCHMEN. Although there's no set date, keep watching DC for more information.

This interview, as I've said, took place in August at the Executive Hotel in San Diego. It was transcribed by yours truly, copy-edited by yours truly with final edits by yours truly. Unfortunately, because of the distance between California and England, it was difficult to send it to Alan for a timely copy-edit. However, I've kept the interview almost verbatim and hope that Alan approves of the following.

Special thanks are due to John Totleben, Richard Bruning, Linda Robak and Peggy May for their time and efforts involved in the breathtaking cover illustration for this issue of THE TELEGRAPH WIRE.

--Wendi Lee

WENDI LEE: I wasn't able to read SWAMP THING #21. I can't get a copy.

ALAN MOORE: Me neither, incidentally. I haven't got a copy.

WENDI: Really? Had you thought about writing for SWAMP THING before you were offered the opportunity?

ALAN: I'd read it before when Len and Berni were doing it in the early seventies. I thought it was the best book on the stands at the time. But if you'd asked me to name the DC characters at the time that I'd most like to write about, I probably wouldn't have even thought of the Swamp Thing.

On the other hand, I find that there's something really nice about having something thrown at you, something you haven't thought of before..

You think, "What would I do if they gave me Superman or Batman?" If they gave me Batman, I think I'd probably have a pretty good idea of what I wanted to do with him just because it's a character you do think about in your spare moments. But just to be told, "We want you to take over the Swamp Thing forever. Have the first script in three weeks time..." or whatever, it forces you to think of a lot of things that you never would have thought about otherwise.

The really strange thing, actually, connected with Swamp Thing is that sometimes when I'm just sitting there and typing, I have a lot of very strange thoughts going through my head. Several weeks before I took on

SWAMP THING, I was thinking "I wonder if I still have the facility to just take a character that's thrown at me - a really odd character, a really obscure character - and do something good with it. Now who's a really obscure character?" And I thought, "The Heap."

WENDI: The what? (That's how obscure, folks! - ed.)

ALAN: The Heap. I was thinking, "What would I do if someone gave me The Heap?" I thought you could probably do something with his camouflage abilities, the fact that you could do nice visual things and the fact that he looks so much like the swamp. I was thinking like that and a couple of weeks later, Len phoned up and said, "Do you want to do SWAMP THING?" And the Swamp Thing is, of course, a direct descendant of The Heap. It was just really, really odd that I'd thought about it prior to the offer.

WENDI: I've never even heard of The Heap!

ALAN: Oh, it used to be in Airboy Comics and I think he was the first swamp creature in comics. He was a German fighter pilot who'd been shot down in the fog and - you know the way these things happen - somewhat strange chemicals and BLDOPBLDDPBLDDPBLDDP... three minutes later, up comes the creature! (Laughter)

No, it was just really odd. I didn't realize until after a couple of weeks of writing SWAMP THING. I didn't remember that I'd been thinking about The Heap.

Taking on the SWAMP THING was great because I had to sit down and just think what I could do with this character. I had to look at the way Len and Berni handled it, the way that Marty Pasko handled him and I had to see what I thought was right about the character as well as what I thought was wrong with the character. Then I had to build upon that.

In the first issue, I just decided to tie up all of Marty's plot lines. I also had to kill the character in the first issue because it just seemed to be something I had to do - almost unconsciously. I just feel the need to work out characters that I take over so I can build them up from the ground level again.

WENDI: Then he becomes yours.

ALAN: That's it! It's a psychological thing. It's a thing that I feel comfortable with if I can have the Swamp Thing blown away in the first issue. Then in the second issue, I can just sit back and relax. I think that's pretty much the story.

WENDI: When I interviewed Mark Evanier and Dan Spiegel for issue 21, they talked about ending the BLACKHAWK series by putting everything back the way it had been when they took it over. They killed off characters that they had created and took everything they put into BLACKHAWK out.

ALAN: I don't know what will happen when I leave SWAMP THING - which, obviously, I will do one day. That's sort of interesting to think about.

WENDI: Do you feel stifled at all by the fact that Swamp Thing must be in or near a swamp? It limits him because he can't wander into a city... or can he?

ALAN: Actually, when I started doing the SWAMP THING, one of the things I thought of was, "Well, he's a thing and he lives in a swamp." And I really saw the swamp as being as important a character in the story as Swamp Thing himself.

During Marty's tenure on the book, certainly, and during a lot of Len's issues, there was a feeling that the swamp was restricting and that they wanted to have Swamp Thing travelling around the world, travelling

across Europe. One of the main problems with this concept was that you have the "boxcar syndrome": if you want to get Swamp Thing from one side of America to the other, or to another country, he has to stay away in boxcars or in the trunk of a car or in the steerage of a ship. It doesn't look right. It isn't the way Swamp Thing should travel. Of course, we've rectified this recently...

WENDI: And brilliantly, I might add!

ALAN: I was quite pleased and happy. It was mainly just a way to get over a problem in the writing because I wanted Swamp Thing to travel.

WENDI: And it's so simple that you don't have to explain any further than the first issue!

ALAN: That's it! He grows up. I do think that was pretty elegant, if I do say so myself.

I mean, for the first twenty-six issues, I was quite happy to have him stay in the swamp and do stories that revolve around the swamp. Steve and John have got a fair feel for the texture of the place.

I was reading up about it. I read about Spanish moss and the water hyacinths and the various insects to try and get a feeling for what the place must be like. The texture of the swamp is really important to the story. I wanted to have him in the swamp for 14 or 15 issues before I took him off anywhere else. Now we have him travelling around America. But he sort of goes back to the swamp every couple of issues so that we can keep that as an important factor.

WENDI: There seems to be a sort of estrangement from Abby. She seems to be acting the way anyone would act when a loved one travels a lot.

ALAN: Well, obviously, she's going to be feeling pretty weird because she does love him but he's not human. He loves her but I figured they would have problems.

But I'm far too sentimental for the job. I really don't like giving my characters problems. I don't want to pile agony upon agony. As far as I'm concerned, the Swamp Thing and Abby are going to be in love forever. They might have the occasional cross word or the occasional distance between them, but no trauma. They're going to be friends all the way through.

WENDI: Trauma can become tedious in story after story.

ALAN: It's unnecessary a lot of the time: "Well, what can we do to this character just to make it interesting?" There's no real reason in terms of the actual character himself, why these things happen. It seems to be something artificial that the writer will dump upon the character in order to generate some interest in the story. The way I see the Swamp Thing and Abby is that they're very much in love. There's no reason why they should have a terrible time and break up just to give everyone some sort of vicarious soap opera thrill. As far as I'm concerned, I think it's sort of refreshing to write about a relationship that works. (Laughter)

WENDI: Tell me a little bit about WATCHMEN.

ALAN: That's something I'm doing for DC. Like I said, I took over SWAMP THING on the run. And I had to get the first script in to DC within three weeks. This meant that the direction of the story that I was bound to for the next couple of years had to be thought out in those next three or four weeks. So there were probably areas of sloppiness.

Also, it was the first time I'd been exposed to a twenty-three page format. That really does make a difference. I really only just mastered the eight-page

format in Britain. The length of stories determines the sort of stories that you do. For example, if you've got a very long story, the timing can be different. You can afford to spend a page dealing with a couple of seconds [characters]. If you've got an eight page story, you don't have that luxury.

In England, I've been working with six and eight-page scripts and just sort of trying to find my way around them. Then, all of a sudden, I've got the twenty-three page format to work with. After twenty-four issues of SWAMP THING, I think I'm starting to get the hang of it. I've done some experimenting, I've messed around and I've seen what can be done. It's not all been successful, but I think I've learned quite a bit.

WATCHMEN is my first project to actually use what I've learned. WATCHMEN is very, very structured. It's twelve issues long.

I know exactly what the image in the last panel is going to be. I can see it as a whole from beginning to end. I'm really pleased with the way it's working.

I've been working closely with Dave Gibbons on the project. Dave's putting so much into it. It's not just the writing; we're coming together on a level of pure story-telling. I mean, the way Dave's drawing things affects the way I'm writing it. The way he's laying out pages is affecting the way I'm writing it. It's a really amazing experience. I'm enjoying it immensely. Most of my stuff, I have a lot of reservations about. Three issues, maybe four issues of SWAMP THING I'd say are really good. But most of them, of course, I don't like--personally.

I mean, I do write an awful lot of rubbish. The AMERICAN FLAGGI stories were rubbish. But WATCHMEN, I think, is the best thing I've ever done. I think it's really, really good.

WENDI: Can you give me an idea of what it's about?

ALAN: Sure. We're trying to step back from the superhero a little bit; we want to take a fresh look at the idea of being a superhero. Joe Schuster and Jerry Siegel brought out SUPERMAN in 1939. There were no other superheroes and I think that for us today, it's very difficult to imagine what the impact of that character was; since Superman in comics, the sky is full of flying men. It's not quite the same. The whole superhero idea has grown up with cliches around it and that has smothered it in a way. You can no longer see the woods for the trees.

What me and Dave have tried to do with WATCHMEN is to somehow get back to that point where we stepped away from the conventional idea of superheroes. I wanted to do something that used the superhero in a very, very different way to the way it's been used before: psychologically.

One of the main things is to see what effect a superhero would have upon the world. In the DC and Marvel universes, they don't have any effect. They're all extraordinary beings, but the world they live in is very much the same as ours.

In WATCHMEN, we try to think it through politically and socially. We've got a character called Mr. Manhattan who is the only actual superhero in the book. He's the only actual one with powers. He emerges about 1965 and from that point on, the world is different forever. Since he's strongly aligned to the American military, obviously, he's like a step beyond the neutron bomb. Instantly, the balance of world power changes.

I think if the American government had found a superhero, they would have been a little bit more adventurous in their foreign policy whereas the Russians would most certainly have been a little more timid.

In the world we're dealing with, America won the Vietnamese war. The Russians have not invaded Afghanistan. Basically, they're in the Kremlin under the



(C) DC 1985

Cover of SWAMP THING #44

table with their fingers in their ears. They're terrified and the only option that they have left is mutually assured destruction. Their backs are against the wall.

You've reached a point where the doomsday clock is seconds away from midnight. It's closer to disaster than our own world is. That is one of the main themes of the book: it's this paranoid, frightening world that's just getting closer and closer to Armageddon. And it's all because of this one superhero.

There are other costumed heroes in the book, but most of them are retired because I don't think that the American legal system, or any legal system, would support superheroes. It would just cause so many problems. If you allow one guy in a mask to go around beating people up, anyone in a mask can beat people up. It just wouldn't work. So most of the superheroes have been forced into retirement--apart from those who are valuable to the military which includes Dr. Manhattan. That is where it all begins.

There's a lot of different threads in it. One of the things that ties the entire story together is a murder mystery that runs all the way through the plot. I can't tell you an awful lot without giving away the plot.

We've got some interesting characters. There's Rorschach who's a really psychotic vigilante. Whereas in most comic books the psychopath will get angry, a real psychopath doesn't get angry. A psychopath will break your arm and smile...or never react at all.

WENDI: That's frightening!

ALAN: Yeah. I've met a couple of psychopaths. They never growl, they never snarl, they never do anything outrageous.

WENDI: They're perfectly pleasant people.

ALAN: Absolutely placid. It's abnormal emotional reactions. That's what Rorschach is all about.

There's another character called the Comedian who's like a one-man CIA Dirty Tricks Division. He's one of the government agents who has been allowed to carry on.

There's a female superhero who basically only took on the job because her mother wanted her to and there's a very self-pitying retired superhero who just mainly sits in his chair and thinks about the old days.

And the world around them looks totally different. Technology's changed: there are no gas guzzlers anymore. There are just these very big, nice-looking electric cars. And the streets look totally different because there are a lot of battery points where the taxis can go and charge themselves up. We're not going to explain all this, but Dave's putting it all in the background so that we can have a complete three-dimensional world where everything makes sense.

There's no McDonald's. Instead there's a chain of Indian fast food restaurants called Gunga-Diners just because of the change in political situation. At some point in the last 15 years, America's had an influx of Indian immigrants, presumably refugees fleeing from one of the political hot spots in the world. That's not important to the story, but we try to realize the world and give it a texture and a feeling. So from the very first panels, you're there in the streets and you think, "That car is wrong. Why are people's lapels different? And the cut of their trousers is different. What are those things that they're smoking? Those aren't cigarettes."



THE BOJEFFRIES SAGA, soon to be a back-up story for DALGOOA.

And we don't explain all this. In fact, there's even a point where Dave's shown a Heinz bean can - and it's got 58 varieties instead of 57. It's just little bits like that running through the story. We just want to dump people into this alien environment where everything is slightly askew, everything is slightly different.

Dave's doing it on a 9-panel page grid. I'm used to working on a 6-panel grid. So when you've got nine panels on a page, the amount of information is suddenly different on a page. And I'm finding that my scripts for WATCHMEN, my normal scripts are pretty thick and heavy, but the scripts for WATCHMEN are a couple of inches thick, maybe an inch and a half. I mean when it lands on Dave's doorstep in the morning, I don't know what he thinks!

WENDI: When is WATCHMEN coming out?

ALAN: It's going to be coming out sometime next summer. We want six issues in-house before we start so that we can avoid the CAMELOT situation. The way this story is structured, if it doesn't come out every month, it'll destroy the whole rhythm of it. It's got to be bang-bang-bang-bang-bang so when people read the first issue, they're stuck on a train to Hell and they don't get off till issue 12! (laughter)

WENDI: I heard that you turned in a forty-page script for MR. MONSTER.

ALAN: It's a six to eight page story. The script was probably around forty or fifty pages. I put a lot of detail into my stories.

WENDI: Mike Gilbert was blown away by that!

ALAN: It's just the way I work when I'm writing. My basic theory is that I've got a single world that I'm writing about in three dimensions. I want to get that over to the artist, but I don't want to imprison the artist. Especially since it's quite likely that he's



Panel from WARRIOR's "V For Vendetta".

got a better visual imagination than I have. I try to give them as much detail as they possibly need, but also explain in the script that if there's a panel that they want to change or if they think they have a better idea, they should follow it up. The script's not engraved in stone. I want to give them maximum freedom and, with the amount of detail, maximum support as well.

WATCHMEN, in particular, has been really, really thick, like I've said. I'm capable of spending two or three typed pages just on one panel, especially if I'm talking about the lighting, and the camera angles, and the positioning of the figures, the atmosphere, the expressions on their faces...when you try to describe reality, there's quite a lot to talk about.

But I think that in the finished product, you get that greater sense of reality, of consequence, of things being solid and real without fuzzy edges.

WENDI: Are there any indications of scripts to come?

ALAN: It's a bit premature, but at the moment, we're trying to set up negotiations for a crossover book between Eclipse and DC with MR. MONSTER and SWAMP THING. It'll be a lot of fun. Paul Levitz and Dick Giordano have no objections to it and when it comes out, I think it should be quite funny.

WENDI: Gee, I think we'll all be looking forward to it! Can you tell me how you can write about superheroes if you've never been in their place?

ALAN: You mean, how can I write about flying when I can't fly? Well, the way I see it, superheroes are just bits of the human personality, bits of the human psyche written large. If I write about a really weak, worthless, snivelling, grubby, despicable character, there are areas in my personality that are weak, pathetic, snivelling and grubby. I believe there are areas in everybody's personality that are like that. You just don't care to look for them very often.

If I'm writing a really horrible, appalling character, I'll look at the areas within myself and drag them out into the light. It's great! It gives you a handle on these low, despicable characters to use as a basis for your stories. It's the areas of mobility that you've got inside yourself.

A lot of people are convinced of their own worthlessness and so they tend not to admit to the areas inside them where they are noble, and big, and strong. Those areas are in people and if you can bring them out, write them large: then you can come up with almost anything.

I believe that each human being has got the potential of every other imaginable human being inside themselves. If you can just plug into that, you can just pick out one piece of the jigsaw, expand that, and turn it into a character.

I really enjoy writing about Swamp Thing because he's so nice. He's so solid, a lot calmer and more solid than I am. I'm sort of projecting those elements in myself. It's a very therapeutic experience. One day you can be a woman without the problem of dressing up in clothes and getting arrested and sort of causing a public scandal! (Laughter) I mean, you can be a transvestite in the privacy of your own living room just by putting yourself into a woman's mind... and that can be a very powerful experience!

I suppose that all men have got feminine elements inside them and all women have masculine elements inside them. You can write about people of different races or species; you can be anybody in the privacy of your own head and just pour it out onto a typewriter.

Sometimes when I'm writing a character like Arcane, I feel very "black". I have to get to the point where I could quite easily wipe out a whole city and not blink. You have to feel that.

You know, writing Etrigan was an incredible experience. Getting into the character was incredibly difficult--he's so heavy. His thoughts are so dense and sort of massive and ugly. I had to think of how his body would feel. He's sort of short and stocky, but I feel that his body probably weighs a couple of tons. I figure that his body is just so dense that he crouches. So I was just standing in front of the mirror hunching my body up and walking around, trying to feel the power of it. I was thinking, "Well, he's got these teeth in the front and he's got this cleft lip...so how's he going to talk? It would deform his speech."

I tried to talk around my teeth like this... (He demonstrates) and eventually, the voice I got was an electronically-distorted Charles Laughton as Captain Bly in Mutiny On The Bounty. That sounded just right for Etrigan--sort of heavier and more guttural with a slight speech impediment.

Once I've gotten the speech and the feel of the body, it's very easy to write the dialogue. I start to feel like I'm inside the character. It's a very psychotic way of working. I wouldn't advise anyone to take it up, but it's very effective. (Laughter)

It enables you to do more powerful writing because you're right there inside the character. That was one of the troubles with the AMERICAN FLAGG! series. Those characters are Howard's and he does them

excellently, but I found that I couldn't get inside them. And consequently, it's a story about surface; there's no emotional resonance. I'd rather get right into something.

WENDI: It's hard to get into Raul.

ALAN: Yes, it is. I could write about a cat, but it would have to be my vision of a cat, not Howard's. And Howard has such a clear vision that I was frightened about contradicting it.

When I was writing Rorschach from WATCHMEN; I found that really disturbing because everything he says is horrible. He has a horrible vision of the world. The first line of WATCHMEN is a caption from Rorschach's journal: "Dead dog in alley this morning. Tire tread on burst stomach. This city is afraid of me: I have seen its true face." And that's just the first caption. I know exactly how he feels when he walks along--unpleasant and horrible.

WENDI: He sees all the terrible things in life.

ALAN: That's all he sees--just murder and death and horror. So you have to live in that world as well. The only good thing is that you're there on holiday for a day. You don't have to live there forever.

WENDI: Are you saying that you must suffer for your art?

ALAN: I'm not saying "Genius is pain" or "Artists suffer", but to be authentic, you've got to put yourself through the wringer a little bit. There's got to be some emotional effort.



(c) Alan Davis

This is who's REALLY Miraclemen!

and Games!

By Steve Perrin

For this second column in the series, I'm going to review three games which attempt to meld the world of games with the Japanese robot toys and models that are so popular in the Comics & Comix stores.

BATTLEDROIDIS

From FASA Corporation, written by Jordan Weisman, developed by Patrick Larkin, \$15.00

BATTLEDROIDIS is basically a board game of giant robot combat. The box provides a playing board with various terrain marked out in hexagons for easy maneuvering. There are 25 pages of rules and 6 pages of "future history" designed to set the scene for the battles.

For Japanese animation fans out there, the basic rationale seems to resemble what little I know of VOTOMS and DUGRAM. There is no outer space action, although the warring cultures are space-travelling.

The culture portrayed is in a Dark Age, unable to make new giant robots. Those that remain are a vestige of a former Imperial glory (a common theme in the science fiction of many countries) which the various warring factions try to keep in repair to aid them in their various wars over the water of different planets.

The actual game rules are divided into three stages of gaming. The basic game deals with movement, shooting, armor penetration and damage. The advanced game adds special damage locations, firing arcs, special ranges, variable weapon damages, physical damage (punching it out hand-to-hand) and heat build-up--an interesting game device that I don't think has any precedent in the Japanese cartoons that this game is supposed to be based on. In short, the engines and weapons of the robot create heat which the robot must shed through "heat sinks" or lose efficiency. Among other things, this means that one good tactic for a robot pilot to use is stepping into a lake to gain the added cooling for the robot's weapons.

The Expert game adds other vehicles--the all-but-doomed tanks, jeeps, and infantry--and individual skill levels for Droidwarriors, the humans who actually "pilot" the battledroids. Further, robots can now intentionally fall down, suffer critical hits, use more varieties of physical attacks, and develop further problems from heat build-up.

Finally, the optional rules allow for clearing woods hexes (the robot becomes a gigantic Tin Woodman--though he may be using incendiary rounds instead of an axe), starting fires, using other droids's blown off arms and legs for clubs, and building robots other than the ones whose characteristics are supplied with the game.

Basically, this is an interesting tank game. The main difference between this game and other games like

PANZERBLITZ is that these tanks have legs. There is very little of the Japanese animation "feel" to this game. The closest it comes is in the name and the robots pictured on the counters provided in the game. The game also provides two plastic models of robots which must be put together and suffer from the problem of being too big for the playing board provided.

Oh yes, about the name: it will be changing soon on new printings of the game. Lucasfilms has persuaded FASA that Lucas has the copyright on the term "droids", so FASA is changing the name to BATTLETECH--now we get to see if Harmony Gold thinks they can claim the term "tech". Also coming out for BATTLETECH are two supplemental adventures: TALES OF THE BLACK WIDOW COMPANY and THE FOX'S TEETH, EXPLOITS OF McINNON'S RAIDERS.

MEKTON--The Battlesuit Combat Game

From the R. Talsorian Company, designed by Mike Pondsmith, \$15.00

MEKTON is the one game published by a northern California company. Like BATTLETECH (DROIDIS), it provides a history to support the particular design of the robots. This time, we are in a galaxy far, far away, fighting on the side of the peaceful Elarans or the conquering Kargans.

The rules are presented as if from a series of lectures by major personalities from both sides of the conflict. Sometimes this is very effective, sometimes it is too cute for words.

Unlike BATTLETECH, MEKTON puts some real effort into role-playing. Unfortunately, there is little connection in the game mechanics between the battling of the robots and the role-playing actions of the characters. Of the rolled characteristics, only one affects a character's ability to handle a robot, and that one ability is downright overwhelming.

Eight pages of the 32 page rule book are devoted to robot construction. Unlike BATTLETECH, MEKTON provides no ready-to-use robots. However, robot construction is not terribly difficult and somewhat enjoyable the first couple of times. Lamentably, there is not much variety in system placement and weapon use; this makes the third or fourth robot that you design rather similar to the first or second.

There is more variety in weapons here than with BATTLETECH; you can buy swords, axes, and whips for the robot, which is closer to the Japanese animation series.

The combat system is bloody and drastic. Beginning robots are terribly fragile. Moreover, the pilot is always in the head unit and an attacker can pick the location to be hit. Considering the power of the attacks against the probable armor of the head section,

don chin's SOOPER HEROES

Hi again, everyone!

I saw an interesting feature in The San Francisco Comicle the other day and thought I might share it with you...

The Question Man

What is the Hardest Thing for You to Do?

(Asked at the San Diego Comic-Con)

by Don C

Elric, Southern Albino Fighter, Melniboné:

Getting a suntan. No matter how long I lay in the sun, I never get any darker!



Iron Man, West Coast Avenger, Silicon Valley:

To scratch myself whenever I feel an itch! I think ROM has the same problem.



Judge Dredd, Crime-Fighter, Mega-City One:

Smile.



Gary Groth, Publisher, Thousand Oaks:

Avoid lawsuits. Sheesh!



Groo The Wanderer, Barbarian for Hire (?), from no place in particular:

Groo cannot make friends. Groo cannot sail on ships. Groo cannot fight. Groo cannot charm women. Groo cannot make money. Groo cannot...



Zippy The Pinhead, Microcephalic Presidential candidate, San Francisco:
To have a bar-mitzvah at a rodeo with Chuck Barris and Nancy Reagan. Yow!



If you like "The Question Man", let us know by writing - if you didn't, don't bother to let us know! Seriously, thanks for reading SOOPER HEROES and be sure to catch me: same bat-colum, same bat-magazine.

God bless,

Don

(C) Michael Moorcock; (C) Marvel; (C) Eagle Comics; (C) Epic/Marvel; (C) Bill Griffith
All art by Don Chin 1985

...AND GAMES (CONT.)

I cannot see how any pilot can survive more than one attack unless he risks all the rest of his robot by using most of his armor on the head.

This problem and others will probably be taken care of in the second edition of the game, which is now being typeset. Even considering the few problems, this is a good "beer-and-pretzels" game for an hour's entertainment. The role-playing and campaign aspects, however, will need more development before I can recommend them.

WARBOTS AND DEATH MACHINES

by John McEwan, published by The QUARTERMASTER, \$15.00

Many years ago, even before the advent of DUNGEONS and DRAGONS (tm), John McEwan published STAR GUARD, a science fiction miniatures game which traced the history of civilization to conflicts with alien races. This was mostly done to support the science fiction miniatures that McEwan also produced under his own name.

Now, John has entered the field of giant robots with a miniatures game based both on his own models and, theoretically, all the robot toys and models out on the market. He does this with a system of measuring the actual model/toy and determining the room for engines, weapons, and other apparatus from the measurements.

Like any miniatures game, this is not a game for beginners. The rules are complex and certainly do not suffer from lack of weapons and possible effects of the weapons. Unlike the other two games, you need at least a pool-table-sized area to play a miniatures game rather than a simple map as supplied with the other two games.

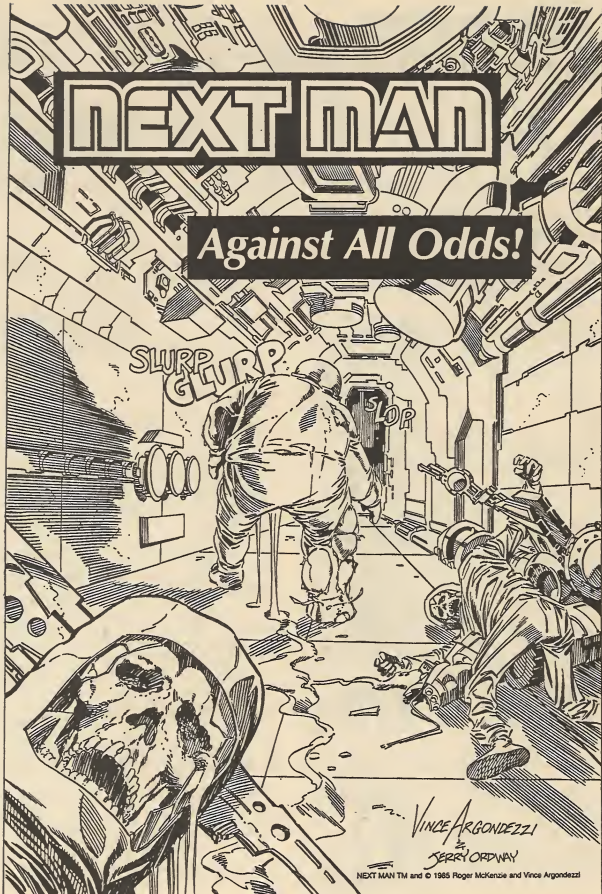
If you are looking for grand battles using the models and toys you have already purchased, this might be what you're looking for. Be prepared to take a fair amount of time setting up a conflict and resolving it. Miniatures games are notorious for taking up an entire day, whether you're playing Medieval fantasy, American Civil War, modern armor, or giant robots! Plan on investing at least six hours.

If this discussion has given you something you want to discuss further, or if you have any other comments and/or inquiries about games and comics, write to me:

Steve Perrin
c/o Comics & Comix
2461 Telegraph
Berkeley, CA 94704

NEXT MAN

Against All Odds!



VINCE ARGONDEZZI
BY SERRY ORDWAY
NEXT MAN TM and © 1985 Roger McKenzie and Vince Argondezzi

MAIN LINES

Comic-book history will be made this month with the publication of WarP's BLOOD OF THE INNOCENT, the first weekly comic for the direct-sales market. The four-issue mini-series by Ricky Shanklin, Mark Wheatley and Marc Hempel, will also be WarP's first full-color comics effort. The first issue of the series, in which Dracula meets Jack the Ripper, is due to hit the stands on--appropriately--Halloween.

Legends DO live at DC: Halloween will mark the return of one of their best-known anthologies, the legendary HOUSE OF MYSTERY. It's been revamped somewhat, however--rather than the familiar figure of Cain narrating the stories, H of M's new caretaker will be the nationally-known hostess of "Movie Macabre", Elvira, and the book's title will reflect the change. Set to become a regular monthly series early next year, this special Halloween edition of ELVIRA'S HOUSE OF MYSTERY will be 64 pages, featuring a cover by Brian Bolland.



(C) DC 1985



(C) Ward Batty 1985



SUGAR AND SPIKE fans have a treat coming up on Halloween as well, as the BEST OF THE DC DIGEST presents Sheldon Mayer's precocious little tykes in 100 pages of their best material. Cost will be \$1.50.

Also in time for Halloween will be the revival of one of the best-remembered of the old "underground" titles, Kitchen Sink's DEATH RATTLE. Reincarnated as a science-fiction title with a horrific bent, RATTLE features work by Rand Holmes, Charles Burns, and Richard Corben. Corben will do the cover for #1.

And what would Halloween be without a new issue of Michael T. Gilbert's MR. MONSTER? Especially when the upcoming issue features a guest appearance by the George Perez of scripting. (Don't believe the Perez reference? Aside from his ongoing projects like SWAMP THING, MIRACLEMAN and WATCHMEN, he has a back-up feature coming out in DALGOOGA called "The Bojeffers Saga", a deluxe reprint of V FOR VENETTA coming out by Eclipse and is working on a collaboration with Donald (MEGATON MAN) Simpson and Lee Marrs. No title has been decided on, but Moore is pushing for OODGEM LOGIC.)

...and now that you have Marrs on your mind, her long-dormant project, UNICORN ISLE, is finally under way again with the artwork of Nicholas Koenig.

Another long-dormant project seeing the light of day at last is David Micheline and Bret Blevins' THE BOZZ CHRONICLES, set for an October release from Epic/Marvel. Micheline, after a long period of inactivity following his award-winning work on IRON MAN, is returning to work in a big way, scripting WEB OF SPIDERMAN and Star/Marvel's adaptation of the new cartoon series, THUNDERCATS, as well as a slew of graphic novels.

The times, they are a-changing at First, as artists of their two most popular titles move on to new projects. GRIMJACK's co-creator, Tim Truman, has gone on to do SCOUT for Eclipse; at his recommendation, the art chores fall to veteran artist, Tom Sutton, who presently draws DC's STAR TREK, as well as the "Black Flame" feature for the suspended STARGLAYER. AND AMERICAN FLAGG!, which caused a lot of fan commotion with the departure of creator Howard Chaykin from the art side of the book (he'll continue to script and do covers), suffered another major setback when replacement artist Bill (ELEMENTALS) Willingham blew his deadline, causing the first missed delivery in the company's history. Joe Staton (E-MAN, GREEN LANTERN) is now the title's artist, and issue #28 is expected to ship fairly soon.

Comics & Comix

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(C) Charles Burns 1985

And while these titles are in an uproar, Comico has one that's going back to its roots. GRENDEL, which introduced Matt Wagner to the world back in COMICO PRIMER #2 and went on to its own short-lived series, will soon graduate from its present back-up slot in MAGE to a full-fledged title of its own. Unlike its previous incarnation, this GRENDEL will be in color.

Fans of Ward Batty's long-running COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE strip, "Trufan Adventures", should be watching the stands around Christmas for a collection of the best of the strip's 250-plus installments. Titled TRUFAN ADVENTURE THEATRE, after an old fanzine published by COMICS JOURNAL alumnus Dwight Decker, the book is planned as a 48-pager selling for \$1.95. Batty has promised "at least eight pages of new material", as well as some other oddball esoterica, including work by CAPA-Alpha mainstay Alan Hutchinson, which has never been in general circulation.

Top left--DEATH RATTLE'S "Ill Bred" by C. Burns; bottom right--WARP's new weekly mini-series, BLOOD OF THE INNOCENT #1



(C) Rickie Shanklin, Mark Wheatley and Marc Hempel/Warp Graphics, Inc. 1985

MAGE



photo by Ann Schubert

TOUR

Matt Wagner stopped at our Palo Alto store in August as part to his much publicized Mage Tour '85.

COMICS & COMIX CALENDAR

Saturday, October 12

Don't miss our Citrus Heights OC 50th party with free posters, comics, prizes and cake! Located at 6135 Sunrise in Birdcage Mall, Citrus Heights.

Saturday, October 19

If you missed the Citrus Heights OC party because of the distance, come to one of our San Francisco parties. On the 19th of this month, the party will move to our Lombard store at 700 Lombard.

Saturday, October 26

Still missed it? Maybe Fairfield is closer. Just head for the Solano Mall in Fairfield!

Saturday, October 26

It's auction night in Palo Alto. No minimum bid on old comics, new comics, movie memorabilia and more! From 7-9 p.m. at 405 California Avenue.

Friday, November 1

Join us in welcoming Mike Mignola (Alpha Flight) and Arthur Adams (Longshot) for an autograph signing at our Berkeley store--2461 Telegraph Avenue.

Saturday, November 2

I know I'll be there for the party at our Palo Alto store. Just head down to 405 California Avenue, Just off of El Camino Real.

Saturday, November 9

Come up to our Sacramento store for our continual celebration of DC's 50th! 921 K Street Mall is the location.

Saturday, November 16

Berkeley is the source of fun this time. Don't forget to come--2461 Telegraph Avenue.

ROMAN'S ARENA



BY THOM ROMAN

E : Recommended

W : Recommended with reservations/For fans, collectors, or other specialized audiences only

L : Send in the lions!

It's been a little windy at the front of this column for the last two issues so this time, I'll keep it short and sweet.

First, let me rectify a boneheaded error I made in the June issue. Kevin Nowlan is the person responsible for the elegant and distinctive lettering of MOONSHADOW. Not that I have anything against Charles Vess, mind you, but I had to see credit go where it was due. Again, I give this title my highest recommendation - for my nickel, it's the only Epic comic that's really worth a buck and a half.

Congratulations are in order for Fantagraphics on the publication of NEW AGE COMICS--it's an important step that needed to be taken. However, I'm hoping that subsequent issues (assembled under less duress than the premiere issue was--if the article in TCJ #100 is any indication) focus more on articles and excerpts from available titles rather than becoming the advertising tract that issue #1 turned out to be. How 'bout it, Gary?

* * *

E THUNDERBUNNY

WaRP Graphics has gone over to the standard comic book size, a move that will certainly help sales of Martin Greim and Brian Buniak's spoofish series about a boy whose dreams of superherohood are answered--sort of. Oh yes, he became fast and strong and nearly invulnerable when he claps his hands together--but those powers belong to a seven-foot tall rabbit!

Greim has created a likeable cast of characters, but aside from that, the stories are pretty much the same durable stuff that Roy Thomas and Gardner Fox served up nearly twenty years ago: bizarre villains out for personal gain, lots of slam-bang action and

not much else. And Buniak's art virtually screams with swipes--in issue #2 alone, I found Neal Adams, Mike Golden, Alex Nino, Wally Wood, Jim Starlin, George Tuska, Berni Wrightson and Marshall Rogers (the villain, Dr. Fog, owes more than a little to Rogers' Clayface); astute readers can probably ferret out even more.

As a fan-published enterprise, THUNDERBUNNY could hold its head up high among its peers. Under the more professional auspices of WaRP, the book simply doesn't deliver value for money.

E MYTHADVENTURES!

I briefly sang huzzahs for this demented delight four months ago: now I get to do so at length. What we have here is an unlikely fable about a bungling delirious would-be thief (appropriately named Skeeve) who lucks into being taken on as an apprentice to a wizard. When that wizard is suddenly assassinated in the act of summoning a "demon" (actually Aahz, a fellow magician from another dimension, who admittedly does look demonic), Skeeve's life takes a dramatic--and hilarious--turn as he and Aahz go through one misadventure after another in their quest to defeat the wizard's assassin, who now seeks to conquer all the dimensions.

Writer/penciller Phil Foglio, with the crackerjack inks and letters of Tim Sale, is the perfect choice for this series, adapted from the original Myth novels by Bob Asprin. Never mind the fact that he's been doing covers and interior art for the books already; Foglio has a quick, expressive style that packs laughter into every line and guffaws into every gesture.

As of issue #6, Foglio took a brave step forward, filling in the empty bits and pieces of continuity in Bob Asprin's original stories with his own material. While I'm sure he's going to get more than his share of tomatoes and eggs from the purists, I'm all for it. After all, the only reason for adapting something to another medium is for the new way of looking at the characters and situations that the new medium offers--a view that Foglio apparently shares as well, judging from the poignant exchange between Skeeve and the femme fatale Tananda near the end of issue #6, or #7's portrayal of Skeeve's late mentor, both madcap and moving.

MYTHADVENTURES! is first-class material from one of the modern-day masters of humor. Even if Wendy Pini never draws another elf, WaRP's place in heaven is secure for putting this one on the stands.

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lombard: the culture connection



LAURA GIVENS



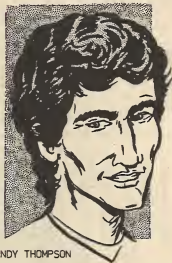
FRANK MCGINN



BRIAN LEE



ROB DAHLEN



ANDY THOMPSON

Our Lombard store is situated in San Francisco's scenic North Beach. With its blend of Chinese and Italian cultures, it's the ideal setting for Comics & Comix to cater to tourists as well as our regular customers. Tourists wander up from Fisherman's Wharf to "ooh" and "ah" their way down the "old comics" wall that stretches the length of the store. Someone can always be heard to moan "Look how much that comic is worth...my mother threw those away years ago!"

Laura Givens has been managing the Lombard store for about a year; she's already showing signs of mental breakdown that se's many of our managers apart from the rest; she has been known to dance in the aisles, "pun" people to death, and hold singalongs for her staff and customers--but only if they sang TV theme songs!

She feels that the potential for comics, as an accessible art form, is unlimited; she wants everyone to experience a little fun in their lives--and this means comics.

Laura loves movies, art (both appreciation and drawing) as well as storytelling. She wants to create a comic of her own when she grows up--meanwhile, Laura loves running a comic book store and says to her staff: "Thanks, guys. I couldn't do it without a little help from my friends!"

Andy Thompson is our new guy. He holds down a regular job during the week, but on Sundays, he dons shorts, jumps on his trusty bicycle and sells comics at Lombard. He brings a little fun into the store when the rest of the crew has had a hard week; it reminds them that they have a fun way to earn a living.

Andy is a Marvel fan from way back, but he's learning that there's more to comics than just Marvel. Now he's learning about DC, First, Comico, etc., but his first love is Spidey. If you want to know who the Hobgoblin REALLY is, ask Andy--he just may know!

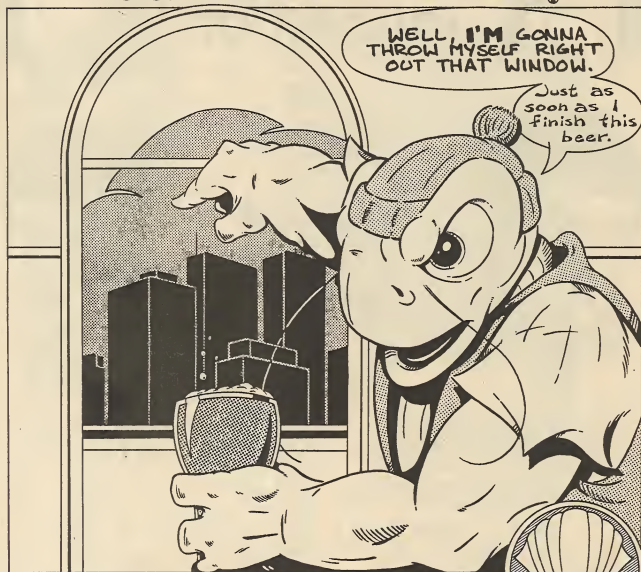
Brian Lee (*no relation to me.--ed.*) makes sure that our card racks and button cases are always full. Sometimes he blushes at their contents, but his laugh is soon to follow. (*Hmmm, maybe he IS related to me!--ed.*)

Brian is the best audience in the world; no joke is too dumb, no story is too dull. When you see him rolling on the floor, don't worry; he didn't lose the broom, he just lost his composure!

Japanese toys and animation are Brian's first love; transforming every toy that C&C carries seems to be his life's ambition.

One of Brian's main attributes is his knowledge of Chinese. This is invaluable in the Lombard neighborhood. One of Brian's most memorable translations was that of a young man who's opinion was that Batman was a pervert for kissing Nocturna on a DC DETECTIVE cover! Brian spent the next five minutes on the floor.

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WORDSMITH #1

If there is one textbook example of the pitfalls a contemporary comic book should avoid, it must be Renegade Press' WORDSMITH. In brief, the book is an honest attempt to capture some of the mystery and suspense of the Twenties' pulp-style magazines when the adventures of pulp heroes fueled the hopes and dreams of Depression Era Americans.

Unfortunately, WORDSMITH merely rambles on, switching back and forth between the mundane existence of a dime-store magazine freelancer and the fanciful adventures about which he writes. The dialogue is very heavy-handed, borrowing dialects and colloquialisms from the Twenties and Thirties. Maybe this is the crux of the book's problem: as readers, we don't particularly care about the character's fantasies--we would rather have a fantasy of our own. Furthermore, it's almost impossible to identify with a hard-luck writer who simply wants to "use my imagination to make a living" without having him go out and have adventures of his own. Dialogue such as, "My ass is sore. I'm going out for a walk", is hardly imaginative or inspiring.

Author Dave Darrigo manages to capture some of the flavor of the Twenties in some character mannerisms. But some vehicle is needed to move the character Clay Washburn (our insipid, if not intrepid word-monger) into interesting, "something's-going-to-happen" situations.

Illustrator R.G. Taylor's style also manages to preserve a bit of nostalgia--old automobiles and Twenties-style clothing abound. Taylor's main weakness, though, lies in his inability to draw lively, concerned characters. I realize that the Depression era was hardly a barrel of laughs, but never have so many expressionless characters graced the pages of a comic since Egyptian hieroglyphics were first scribbled on pyramid walls.

WORDSMITH is a self-indulgent, uninteresting comic with little tension and no direction. It is quite possible that those responsible for WORDSMITH had hoped to rekindle some of the excitement and simplicity of the pulps. A good pulp, however, had more going for it than a "feel" and a "tone". Somebody should tell Darrigo and his creation, Clay Washburn, that sometimes, words simply aren't enough.

MR. MONSTER #1, #2

Malevolent monsters and misshapen misanthropes beware: Mr. Monster has your number! With tongue firmly in cheek, Eclipse Comics' MR. MONSTER auspiciously takes its place with other venerable horror/humor comics.

In the tried-and-true tradition of those classic William F. Gaines' MAD magazines from the Fifties, MR. MONSTER offers the comics aficionado an almost nostalgic mixture of humor and horror in which the title's fearless hero, Doc Stearn (alias Mr. Monster), fights a worthy battle to "find monsters and destroy them." But creator/artist Michael T. Gilbert has tempered the melodramatic antics of Doc Stearn with a fair amount of gore in the first issue in an almost uncomfortable blend of frivolity and fear.

For the record, Mr. Monster's first adventure, "The Case of the Reluctant Werewolf", concerns a hapless schlemiel who is stricken with lycanthropy after being bitten by a local member of the Were-devils Athletic Club--a group of punk werewolves. Doc Stearn's goal is to cure his mild-mannered patient and destroy his hairy adversaries.

Mr. Monster's second adventure is an even more curious mixture of horror and humor. Issue #2 sees our hero trying to solve the riddle of a monstrous blood disease that has stricken one of Mr. Monster's clients, which leads to a second riddle: the mystery of Hemo-Boy. The mere fact that Mr. Monster's client is named "Mr. Scroggy" is a pleasant inside joke; Mr. Scroggy is a former PC editor!

The unpleasanties associated with the book include large doses of gratuitous gore and violence. Rather than contributing to the mood of the comic, such graphic scenes do nothing more than detract and distract from the good-naturedness of the comic.

Gilbert and William Loeb's artwork, however, is quite refreshing. Colorful and innovative layouts give the book a certain appeal first popularized by a host of Silver Age artists such as Neal Adams and Barry Smith. Gilbert and Loeb's Gothic artwork most closely resembles Will Eisner's early SPIRIT series. While on the subject of competent artwork, the second issue of MR. MONSTER features a delightful cover by Dave Stevens which in itself may make the book worth purchasing.

Although an origin issue has yet to be produced, Gilbert makes no secret of MR. MONSTER's heritage. According to Gilbert, MR. MONSTER was originally created in the Forties and had only appeared once or twice before in some obscure Golden Age comic. Gilbert changed the character's appearance and mannerisms and secured copyrights for his resurrected character.

As a whole, Mr. Monster is a character with great potential and a unique gimmick. MR. MONSTER might be worth a quick read possibly for one main reason: originality is a rare commodity in comics these days.

--KEN HEIMAN

THE FISH POLICE

Maybe it's not kosher for an employee of Comics & Conix to review another employee's first attempt at publishing a comic...but I gotta have SOME fun. Besides, to this date, I still haven't met Steve Moncuse--he works in our Berkeley store and I'm down here in Palo Alto.

THE FISH POLICE is the most professional-looking package I've ever seen from a budding professional to ever hit the stands. The art is clean, bold lines and Steve Moncuse keeps the story moving with innovative layouts that complement Paul Nagy's story.

The plot and characters are kind of a combination of the Fish Mutants meet Hill Street Blues. The main character, Inspector Gill, is Belker in fish guise and the plot concerns a bad guy, Hook, who has a drug and a dream to take over more than one world.

While I understand the need to keep the plot from being given away in the first issue, I'm more than a little anxious to find out what all the mystery is about these fish-people. More than one character has made allusions to being "only half the man I once was." So please, guys, explain that one to me in the next issue, huh?

While it's not a slam-bang issue, it has a distinction all its own and I recommend it for anyone who enjoys a good story and great art...and the nice thing is that this comic can only get better!

--WENDI LEE

ARENA (CONT.)



SPACE ARK

I haven't had much to say about Americomics--I've found it to be a derivative, unimaginative company, most of which the titles would get fed to the lions if I ever got around to them. So it's a surprise and delight to come across this funny-animal first issue from creator/artist Ken Mitcheroney, ably assisted by writer Mark Cantrell.

"Mitch" has a clean, Hanna-Barbera-influenced style and enough savvy to keep things moving at a pony pace, while Cantrell stuffs the pita-thin plot (concerning an alien race's attempt to take over the universe through merchandising) with enough gags, groaners and pratfalls to give everyone their money's worth of fun! The characters are all well-chosen, providing material for a good, long run of hilarious adventure.

I would prefer seeing Tom Scott's lettering take up a little less room in future issues as well as a little more contrast from colorist Rebekah Black, but these are minor cavils. Americomics has finally delivered a winner in SPACE ARK and I'm more than pleased to spread the word.

Until next issue, this is Thom Roman saying: "Good night Norman Vincent Peale, wherever you are..."



LOMBARD (CONT.)

Do you need to know something about--anything? Rob Dahlen is the man with the answers. Role-playing games and science fiction books are his specialties but he's a veritable fountain of information on...Japanese toys? No problem. Rock 'n' roll? Rob's your man. Old comics, new comics, even comics that aren't out yet--he seems to have the market cornered on all of it. He always makes sure we're stocked with the hottest items!

Rob is the only person around who seems to understand what's happening in STARSTRUCK! It's scary sometimes, but boy, is he handy to have around.

Now YOU have a friend in the comics business! As assistant manager and old comics expert, Frank has been known to move heaven and earth to find that rare comic for an eager customer.

Frank has a special rapport with young collectors; he never treats them differently, he's just as nasty and threatening with them as he is with the older customers! (Just kidding, Frank!) At least he does it all with a smile on his face and a twinkle in his eye! That's what I call unbiased.

Some of Frank's better known customers have been Darryl Hall (of Hall and Gates) and Mr. T. We sort of think Frank is a minor celebrity in his own right! But he still won't be happy until his idol drops by the Lombard shop--where are you, Godzilla?

BUILDING THE PERFECT ROBOT



Bruce Barlow of Moraga, California was the first place winner of the June 23rd Model Building Contest at our Berkeley store.

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I am an unashamed reader of children's books. In fact, some of the best fantasies I've read have been published for children. One of the best publishers for hardcover children's fantasies is Atheneum. They have published LeGuin's second and third EARTHSEA novels, all of Patricia McKillip's stories, McCaffrey's Harper Hall books and most of Susan Cooper's work. About three years ago, Atheneum published a first novel by P.G. Hodgell entitled GOD STALK. This was one of the few books favorably compared with Fritz Leiber's Fafhrd and Grey Mouser stories: it combined humor, suspense and characterization in a subtle ever-changing blend.

GOD STALK, now changed to GOODSTALK, is out in Berkeley paperback at \$2.75. If you can read the first book and not pick up the second, DARK OF THE MOON, I'll be very surprised!

One of my favorite authors is Daniel Manus Pinkwater. He writes off-the-wall children's books under variations of his unusual name. This fall, he has a new book coming out under the pen name "Honest Dan" Pinkwater. Someone has finally realized that his peculiar stories of adolescents reacting to surreal situations also appeal to adults. Tor Books is bringing out YOUNG ADULTS (\$5.95) which includes two previously unpublished sequels, "Dead End Oada" and "The Oada Boys in Collitch (The First Chapter)" as well as "The Confessions of Pinkwater". Interspersed among these gems are "W.A. Mozart, Superhero", "The Buttoniad", "Pigamorphosis" plus comic strips drawn by Pinkwater on a MacIntosh computer.

The first three adventures feature the Wild Dada Ducks. The narrator is Charles the Cat and he chronicles the adventures of the champions of the Oadaist movement at Margaret Himler High School. Because the majority of students at the high school don't understand the Oadaist movement, the Dadas have very few friends outside of their group. They make up a character named Kevin Shapiro, Boy Orphan, who never solves any of his problems--unlike the heroes they read about in books at school.

Imagine their surprise when a new boy starts school and his name is Kevin Shapiro! They try to make him a school hero whether he wants to be or not. Little do they know what they're in for...

This is a book for anyone who didn't fit in high school: crazy, subversive and just a little too real for comfort. If you like Gilbert Shelton, you'll like Daniel Manus Pinkwater.

Samuel R. Delany's STARS IN MY POCKET LIKE GRAINS OF SAND (Bantam SPECTRA, \$3.95) is definitely not a light diversion. This is the first volume in a diptych. The second book should be coming out in hard-

back soon. Although the editor of STARS...hails this book as a return to the old Delany, I don't see it as a complete return. I'll admit, however, that it comes closer than the past ten years of his work.

This is the story of Rat Korga and Marq Oyeth. It's set in a future world full of complex politics. Rat is the sole survivor of the destroyed world Rhyonon. Rhyonon was one of the worlds belonging to the Web. Rat's name came from a process he went through called Radical Anxiety Termination. It leaves its victim with no real mind of his own.

Marq is an Industrial Diplomat, a dealer of information in a society that holds information up as its single most important commodity--yet even the simplest terms are uncertain.

I like the concepts in this book, but the politics are complex and hard to grasp. I find the Perfect Erotic Object--the base of the whole book--to be a major step backwards; physiognomy isn't the most important part of a relationship. However, if you find AMERICAN FLAGGI easy to understand, this is a book you should read; Delany and Chaykin have worked together in the past and share similar complexities in their writing.

Most of all, this book will make you think; even if you don't like it, it will unsettle you. And watch out: some of the words that you think you understand (like pronouns) don't mean what you think!

A brief note: Horror fans should watch for CLIVE BARKER'S BOOKS OF BLOOD, available now in British paperback and coming from Berkeley starting in December. Short stories of slightly uneven quality--the worst are only a little scary but the best are exquisite! Check 'em out.

Next time: some books for Christmas, with luck.

Tom Whitmore is a well-respected member of the science fiction and fantasy field. A contributor to various fanzines, Tom is also co-owner of THE OTHER CHANGE OF HOBBIT, a fine SF and fantasy bookstore, located in Berkeley's Sather Gate Mall, at 2433 Channing Way.

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Best,
Bob Laughlin

P.S. I have a daughter named Wendy Lee...

Thanks for writing (and spelling my name correctly) and if any of you don't know who this lovely person is (who happened to have the good taste to name his daughter Wendy Lee), shame on you! But just for the record, Bob Laughlin is the creator of KITZ 'n' KATZ, published by Eclipse. creator of KITZ 'n' KATZ, a great comic for those of us who have a weird sense of humor!

I would like to invite comments and criticisms by those of you who wish to write. Please send letters to:

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Till next issue! --ed.



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Telegraph Wire # 23 (1985)

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